

recommended by him, a case recovery of 80 per cent is possible, provided the patient is attended by the medical officer before the stage of collapse supervenes. The drinking of potassium permanganate dissolved in water is also considered to be

of value as a protection against initial infection, and accordingly in various parts of India permanganate pills are distributed to local relief organizations as are the quinine tablets supplied in the prophylaxis of malaria.



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS AND PRIVATE HEALTH AGENCIES.

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This author takes issue with Dr. Hill on the functions of health officers. He believes that they should undertake all kinds of public health work, that responsibility divided with private agencies will hurt the health officer's work, that public health education is necessary and that this must be conducted by the health officer if he is to fill adequately his sphere. Private agencies should bend their efforts to support the health officer. : : : : : : : :

IN his very interesting paper, "What Is the Matter with Public Health Today," published in the November number of the JOURNAL, Dr. Hibbert W. Hill, executive secretary of the Minnesota Public Health Association, puts the responsibility for lack of efficiency in the control of infectious diseases squarely on the shoulders of public health officers. No student of public health administration will disagree with Dr. Hill when he says that the protection of the public from infectious disease is the *sine qua non* of health work, and that health officers all over the country have failed to exercise their police powers intelligently and effectively to this end. But Dr. Hill's suggestion that public health officers should limit themselves to compulsory police work against infectious diseases and turn over to the private volunteer agencies those health activities which are essentially educational and

depend for their effectiveness upon the voluntary action of the public, is not, it is believed, based on the same sound premise. On the contrary, there is good reason for thinking that the plan which he proposes for dividing responsibility between official and volunteer agencies will contribute to rather than eliminate present weaknesses in health administration. While recognizing his lack of authority to speak for the health departments of the country, it is the purpose of the writer to present certain arguments against Dr. Hill's proposal. The health officers of the states and cities will no doubt think of many more.

Public health work is, as its name indicates, a matter of *public* concern and *public* necessity. The public ought, therefore, to be represented in all health activities which it supports, by an official agency, which is the department of health, and by an official agent, who is the

health officer. The health officer is the one who ought to be held responsible for the health of a community without any limitation as to the meaning of the phrase "the health of the community." He ought not be permitted to divide his responsibility with anyone. No matter how well organized and well-financed private agencies may be, and no matter to what extent the health officer may find it desirable to use them, there should be one public health administration with the health officer at its head, and one public health program under his control. If the health officer is wise he will encourage the coöperation of private agencies but he should not divide his responsibility for the public health with them.

Studies of state and municipal health administration in the United States show clearly that the failure of many health officers to measure up to their jobs is due in large measure to divided responsibility for control. Private health agencies came into being largely because groups of citizens saw needs which were not being met by the official agencies. Instead of directing their efforts to strengthening official agencies where weaknesses were seen, these groups of citizens quite naturally decided that the thing to do was to create new organizations to do what the already established official organizations ought to have done but did not do. This is the American way of trying to develop efficiency of government and it is one of the reasons why "efficient democracy" is as yet only a vision. Bound by no limitations except as to funds, and responsible to no one but their supporters, the private health agencies have grown rapidly until, at the present time, the health officer is beginning to wonder whether he is the ring-master or only the clown of the circus.

The health officer himself is largely responsible for this not unusual situation,

for, in many instances, he has aided and abetted the private agencies in taking from him responsibilities which he alone should carry. He has done this, either because he was ill-fitted for the work himself, or because he despaired of doing what he thought necessary without adequate funds. In either case the result has been the same; finding private health agencies willing to carry the load for him, he has often contented himself with doing a little amateur police work, as Dr. Hill says, and as time has gone on, he has found little inspiration in such police work and has depended more and more on the private agencies. Finally he becomes, instead of a figure, a mere figure head in the public health program.

The situation just described is not an imaginary one. It is found in cities and states all over the country, and wherever there is found this division of responsibility between the official health authority and the private volunteer health agency, there is usually found irresponsibility on the part of both. No health program can be really effective until it has a real head who can plan every detail of the program, and say how it shall be carried out. In other words, there must be one control, no matter what agencies may be coöperating.

But aside from the fact that Dr. Hill recommends division of responsibility for public health work, which, it is believed, will inevitably result in inefficiency of public health administration, he attempts to differentiate compulsory and voluntary activities as two relatively independent groups, a differentiation not practically possible in public health administration. The compulsory activities of a health department are absolutely dependent upon the preparation of the public for compulsion by thorough educational measures. This is well illustrated in the case of protection against infectious disease,

which Dr. Hill rightly regards as the essential function of a public health department. If health officers all over the country had limited themselves to police regulation of infectious diseases and left the educational side of infectious disease control to private agencies, it is quite probable that we should have even seen then the 1 per cent efficiency in infectious disease work with which Dr. Hill credits health departments. As long as the public views the health officer as a mere policeman, just so long will there be inefficiency of reporting infectious diseases, upon which all subsequent measures of control depend. There will be even more frequent concealment of cases, and a tendency on the part of the people to avoid any contact whatever with the police health officer. Police regulation is absolutely essential; we ought to have more intelligent police regulation than we now have, but unless police regulation goes hand in hand with education, it will never produce permanent results. This is as true in the prevention of crime as in the prevention of disease, and the modern, progressive police department recognizes this fact in carrying on its program of crime prevention.

The public recognizes the health officer as the one to whom it should look for advice and wise counsel in health matters, and it rightly expects to get its education in health matters from some one who officially represents it. Whether the health officer is efficient or not, he is the one who should educate his public. Most people stand in the same relation to the health officer as the school boy to his teacher. Away back in the school boy's head there is a sort of vague notion that education is all right for some one else, but he really wouldn't take a good dose of it himself if he didn't have respect for the authority of his teacher. Compulsion in his case goes

hand in hand with education. So it is with the public; if the teaching is brought to the public by one whom the public holds in respect as having police power, and who is at the same time competent to teach, the teaching will be much more readily accepted, much more highly valued, and much more generally made use of. To leave this responsibility for teaching, to private agencies having no official status in the eyes of the public, would, it is believed, be a serious mistake. Most health officers will probably subscribe to the statement of Dr. C. J. Hastings, the able medical officer of health of Toronto: "91/100 of the permanent efficient results of the department of public health is in education."

Efficient public health administration depends upon putting well-trained, whole-time health officers into local health departments and keeping them there. How is this to be done? Certainly it can never be done through salaries alone, for the kind of men and women needed in public health departments can, in the majority of instances, earn higher salaries in private employment. It must be done, then, by making the opportunity for public service, and for self expression in that service, so great that competent men and women will be drawn to public service even though salaries are inadequate. It would be hard to estimate what the salary of an efficient health officer ought to be; he cannot be paid enough if he is really efficient, but if he is given opportunity to be an educator as well as a police officer, he will probably feel that he has compensation which is not measured by salary alone. To take away from the public health officer such opportunity for service as is found in educational health work would be to rob him of part of his compensation, and make health administration so unattractive, except perhaps for the policeman-epi-

demologist, that few would care to enter it. Public health service would indeed be a poor outlet, under such circumstances, for the men and women who have spent, and are spending their time and money to fit themselves as health officers. Private health agencies would perhaps offer them the opportunities which they seek, but certainly the standards of official health service would be lowered.

No small part of the inefficiency of public administration in this country is the result of the failure of health officers to present health needs convincingly and intelligently to the public, and, as a natural sequence, to the failure of appropriating bodies to recognize the vital necessity for meeting health needs with adequate appropriations. If then, as Dr. Hill suggests, the health officer is shorn of all responsibility for health work which has a real appeal to those who hold the purse strings, the financing of official public health work will be even more difficult than it has been in the past. No matter how carefully thought out the health officer's program may be, no matter how imposing his array of facts and figures, he will find it well-nigh impossible to stir the sympathies of the appropriating body or the public, if his appeal for funds is based only upon the need for better police control of infectious diseases. The American people do not want to be policed, and except in the face of an epidemic, they are reluctant to spend money for police health work. This attitude cannot be condoned, of course, but, nevertheless, it must be reckoned with. On the other hand, it is comparatively easy for health officers to get money for educational work for the prevention of infant mortality, the protection of motherhood, the supervision of the health of school children, and other activities which have a direct appeal to human sympathies, and which Dr. Hill

classifies as voluntary. If the health officer turns over this weapon of education to the private agencies and relies only upon his policeman's baton, the private agencies will get the money for health work and he will be left out in the cold. The public wants to have its emotions stirred, and stimulation of its pocket-book nerve will get little response unless such stimulation arouses a real emotional thrill. But, if the emotions of the public can be stirred, it is usually quite ready to give financial support to the measures proposed. The experience of the Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, Y. M. C. A., and other organizations during the war and since, proves what can be accomplished in raising money by appeal to human sympathy. It is believed, therefore, that any plan of health administration which would take away from the health officer the opportunity to make his plea for increased appropriation on the basis of the need for educational work, would seriously hamper him in securing sufficient funds even for the necessary compulsory police work of his department.

The questions which Dr. Hill raises are by no means academic. In view of the widespread health propaganda of private health agencies, and their well organized activities along many health lines, it is highly desirable that there be a definition of the principles upon which their relation to official health departments shall be based. It is the opinion of the writer that the private health agencies have mistaken their function and misunderstood their relation to the government. The ideal state is one in which the machinery of government shall be so efficient, and so well supported by public funds, that there will be no need for private agencies. This is an ideal which probably will never be reached, but it is an ideal worth working for. If,

instead of trying to strengthen their own organizations and their own grips upon the public health program, private agencies would spend their time and money in strengthening official health agencies, better and more permanent health benefits would result. If, in those communities where the health departments are without competent whole-time health officers, inadequately supported, and improperly organized, the private agencies would carry on a campaign of education which would result in a public demand for these essentials, there would be more efficient health departments and more whole-time, well-trained health officers than we now have. If the private health agencies would study the needs of the health departments in their communities, and at budget time back up the health officers in their demand for larger appropriations of public money, they would do more for raising the efficiency of public health work than by all manner of "drives" to raise funds for their own spending. If, where there is a competent, well-trained health officer, the private agencies would place themselves at his disposal and permit him to direct their activities according to his plan, they would save money and accomplish

more. The experience of the private health agencies of Dayton under unified health department control illustrates very well how this can be done for the health benefit of a community.

Briefly summarized the arguments made against the proposal for divided responsibility for health service as set forth in Dr. Hill's paper are:

1. That divided responsibility for public health will result in lowering standards of official health administration;
2. That compulsory health work is dependent for its efficiency on the educational preparation of the public for compulsion, and that health education to be most effective must be brought to the public by the one who has official authority, namely, the health officer;
3. That, if official health departments are concerned only with police regulation of infectious diseases, there will be little in official health service to attract well-trained, whole-time executives;
4. That the removal of educational health work from the control of official health departments will handicap such departments in securing adequate appropriations, even for the very essential police work necessary.



Mental Hygiene in the Schools.—That health is something more than mere physical health is becoming more and more apparent. The importance of good mental health in addition to good physical health has become quite obvious. Heretofore children in the schools were taught only the principles of good physical health. This must be supplemented today by instruction in mental hygiene. Not only should every child receive a thorough physical examination once a year, but a thorough mental examination should also be included. Defects that are discovered should be given prompt treatment and remedied. Children should be taught the general anatomy and physiology of the nervous system

and its relation to other parts of the body and the mind. The general principles of psychology should also be included. Teachers should be able to recognize early mental defects, so that the child may receive early treatment. The mind of the child should receive proper food,—the kind that will stimulate it, and bring out its greatest possibilities. It must not be overtaxed, however. The mind should receive complete rest, through sound sleep, relaxation and recreation. The environment should be cheerful and bright, so as to produce a favorable effect on the mind.—Horatio M. Pollock, Ph. D., *Boston Med. and Surg. Jour.*, Aug. 14, 1919.

(M. P. H.)